When One-Size Methods Class Doesn't Fit All: A Self-Study of Teaching Traditional and Alternative Licensure Students Together

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ABSTRACT: This article uses a narrative approach to start a dialogue about the challenges of teaching blended methods classes that contain traditional and alternative licensure students. Many alternative licensure students enter their methods classes as lateral-entry teachers who must balance their licensure requirements with the demands associated with full-time teaching. However, the needs of these students are often considerably different from those of traditional undergraduate teacher education students, which creates formidable challenges for instructors of blended classes. After reflecting on our experiences in teaching these types of blended classes, we offer recommendations for methods professors who find themselves in similar contexts.

Over the past several decades, teacher shortages have forced states to consider alternative teacher licensure programs in lieu of traditional 4- or 5-year undergraduate teacher training programs offered through colleges and universities. Many of these alternative routes consist of lateral-entry programs in which school districts offer teaching positions to unlicensed individuals with the expectation that they will complete state licensure requirements within a predetermined amount of time. Lateral-entry teachers have undergraduate or graduate degrees in a content area and are hired by school districts to teach on the basis of their content area expertise but have yet to receive certification through a teacher training program. While some proponents of alternative licensure programs have argued that these routes to teacher licensure have actually benefited traditional teacher education programs by increasing awareness of the needs of novice teachers and by fostering greater cooperation among teacher education departments and local schools (e.g., Hawley, 1990), a relatively unexplored consequence of this movement is the challenge of teaching blended classes comprising undergraduates and lateral-entry teachers.

Methods classes, in which students are introduced to strategies and resources to effectively teach content, can be particularly challenging to teach to blended classes. The experiences and dispositions that lateral-entry teachers bring into the methods classroom often do not mesh with the instructional strategies and dispositions that the methods instructor seeks to pass

along to his or her preservice teachers, thereby setting the stage for potential confrontation or possible alienation of certain students. This article is part of an ongoing conversation between two instructors of blended methods classes—one whose classes have primarily comprised undergraduates and one whose classes have been predominately lateral-entry students—who are regularly faced with trying to find an instructional balance that meets the needs of all their students.

As such, it is our hope that this article acts as a starting point for future discussions about how to best meet the needs of traditional and alternative licensure students in blended classes. After briefly reviewing the literature on alternative licensure programs and the needs of lateral-entry students, we provide narrative descriptions of the challenges that we have encountered in our blended methods classrooms. We then end with strategies and suggestions for other methods instructors faced with the same issue.

Background and Context

Alternative licensure programs have been in existence since the 1980s, when New Jersey became the first state to sponsor an alternative route to certification in response to statewide teacher shortages. By the mid-1990s, nearly every state had developed some form of alternative certification program (Feistritzer & Chester, 2003; Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). These programs have historically aimed at increasing the number of teachers in fields traditionally identified with teacher shortages and high turnover rates—namely, math, science, special education, and English-language instruction in rural, urban, and high-poverty schools (Ingersoll, 2003; Thomas, Mahlios, Friedman-Nimz, & O'Brien, 2005); however, as many states continue to face widespread teacher shortages, there has been increased demand for alternative licensure candidates in all disciplines. While these programs vary from state to state, one common factor appears to be the need for these teachers to be "fast-tracked" into the classroom through lateral-entry positions while they simultaneously complete their licensure requirements, a process that many states have accelerated through online coursework (Simmons & Mebane, 2005; Zirkle, 2005). In addition to state-directed programs, individuals can seek alternative licensure through organizations such as Teach for America and the Knowledge is Power Program (Tell, 2001).

In North Carolina, which is the context for this article, most alternative licensure candidates enter the profession through a program called NC TEACH. This program, which started in 2000, is designed to recruit, train, and retain highly qualified professionals who desire to enter the teaching profession, particularly from underrepresented populations and in high-needs areas (Simmons & Mebane, 2005; Veal, 2002). NC TEACH prepares individuals for middle and secondary licensure in all core academic disciplines as

well as K–12 licensure in special education and foreign language. Individuals are eligible to participate in NC TEACH if they hold an undergraduate degree in an area relevant to the discipline they wish to teach and if they meet a minimum grade point average (Simmons & Mebane, 2005).

Typically, NC TEACH licensure candidates take lateral-entry positions and receive provisional licenses while they complete their licensure requirements, which can take between 1 and 3 years (Simmons & Mebane, 2005). Candidates can take their required courses at various host sites throughout the state or, since 2004, through an online NC TEACH program (Cleveland, 2003; Simmons & Mebane, 2005). At the host university, NC TEACH students complete a program that consists of an orientation, a 5-week summer institute, monthly professional development seminars, content courses in their discipline, and a number of required pedagogical courses, including content area methods. One of the goals of the NC TEACH program is for its students to use the knowledge and experiences gleaned from their lateral-entry positions as a framework to contextualize their licensure coursework (Simmons & Mebane, 2005; Veal, 2002).

While a lengthy discussion on the merits of alternative licensure programs is beyond the scope of this article, the literature is somewhat conflicted on this issue. Many prominent educators, such as Darling-Hammond (2003), continue to argue that alternative licensure programs provide inadequate training compared to traditional 4- or 5-year undergraduate programs, and recent research supports those assertions. Using statewide end-of-course test score data from North Carolina, Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor (2010) found that teachers' credentials, including whether a teacher was licensed, were correlated with student achievement. Specifically, they found that students taught by teachers holding a lateral-entry license achieved lower scores on end-of-course tests than did those who had been taught by teachers holding a traditional license.

However, other research that compared the retention rates and performance of alternatively and traditionally licensed teachers is not as straightforward. In their review of the literature, Zeichner and Schulte (2001) found that, in some cases, alternatively licensed teachers seemed to outperform their traditionally certified counterparts, in terms of retention and various measures of teaching prowess. In addition, it does appear that alternative routes to licensure, nationally and in North Carolina, have made significant strides toward diversifying the teaching profession through their efforts to recruit and retain teachers of color (Simmons & Mebane, 2005; Zeichner & Schulte, 2001).

Regardless of how one might feel about alternative licensure programs, perpetual teacher shortages in the United States will ensure that most states continue to offer these types of programs as viable ways of entering the profession. If current trends persist, even more lateral-entry teachers will enter teacher education programs in subsequent decades. Therefore, it is essential

that teacher educators begin to recognize the needs that these students bring with them into the classroom and how those needs are often different from those of traditional licensure students.

Needs of Alternative Licensure Students

While there is no shortage of literature on the needs of traditional preservice teachers, there exists considerably less research on the needs of alternative licensure candidates. Given the often stark differences in the demographics and life experiences of traditional and alternative licensure candidates, it is not surprising that the latter often have unique emotional and pedagogical needs. For example, alternative licensure programs tend to attract midcareer professionals from a wide range of disciplines, which means that these students tend to be older than traditional undergraduates. While the motivation to switch careers is inevitably different for each individual, early studies found that most alternatively certified teachers entered the profession out of a strong desire to become a teacher, out of a love for children or the need for a more meaningful career or because they felt they had no other options based on the nature of their academic degrees or their inability to find gainful employment (Crow, Levine, & Nager, 1990; Stevens & Dial, 1993).

Moreover, alternative licensure programs often target and recruit from nontraditional teaching populations, such as retired military personnel or professionals in specific subject areas of shortage, such as math and science. Furthermore, the mission of many alternative licensure programs to recruit teachers of color to serve in underprivileged urban schools often results in a teacher population that is considerably more diverse than what is typically found in traditional teacher education programs (Zeichner & Schulte, 2001). Collectively, these differences, along with the stress of being placed in a classroom without any formal training, suggests that alternative licensure candidates will enter their teacher training courses with needs considerably different from those of their undergraduate peers.

In particular, research suggests that the backgrounds of lateral-entry teachers cause them to be fairly confident in their knowledge of content, at least in comparison to traditional licensure candidates, but they often experience difficulty with the nonacademic aspects of teaching, such as classroom management, working with English-language learners and students with disabilities, and dealing with parents (Corbell, Booth, & Reiman, 2010). The fact that most lateral-entry teachers are placed in low-performing urban or rural schools, which often contain considerable discipline problems or an influx of English-language learners and students from low socioeconomic households, only exacerbates this problem. In a qualitative study of NC TEACH candidates, Cleveland (2003) found that many of these teachers felt constant pressure to raise test scores in their classes, which led to feelings of anxiety

and resentment toward teaching and even caused some of the teachers to leave the program in the middle of the school year. These findings correlate with other qualitative studies of alternative licensure students that found that these students had misjudged the difficulty of teaching and the issues associated with teaching in urban and rural schools. Even academically, many lateral-entry teachers admitted that the ways in which they had learned their discipline did not necessarily translate to the students whom they were teaching (Stevens & Dial, 1993; Veal, 2002).

In light of this research, Corbell and colleagues (2010) argue that a one-size-fits-all approach to educating teacher candidates does not meet the needs of lateral-entry teachers. They recommend that alternative licensure candidates receive increased emphasis on classroom management and more strategies for teaching special education and English-language learners. Similarly, in a study of lateral-entry science teachers, Veal (2002) posits that these students would benefit from a more nuanced understanding of cognitive development and sociocultural factors that influence student learning and behavior.

Perhaps even more significant than a change in instructional focus is the need of lateral-entry teachers to feel supported during the rocky moments of their classroom instruction. The e-mail support group among members of an NC TEACH cohort described by Cleveland (2003) seemed essential for many of those teachers to weather the constant ups and downs of their first year of teaching. It is important for teacher educators to remember that these lateral-entry students will often come to their classes discouraged and overwhelmed, and it is imperative that these students feel as though they are in a supportive environment. Furthermore, Gimbert, Wallace, Cristol, and Sene (2005) argue that this environment should be fostered through a partnership between universities and school systems to provide adequate mentorship for lateral-entry teachers both in and out of the classroom.

For teacher educators, meeting the needs of these students can be a daunting task, especially in blended courses. As methods instructors, we have dealt with this issue in our teaching with, admittedly, mixed results. In the remainder of this article, we describe some of the challenges that we have faced teaching blended methods courses, before ending with recommendations based on this reflective self-study of our experiences.

Context and Method

As previously stated, this article is part of an ongoing dialogue between us on how best to meet the needs of all of our methods students. We are both former high school teachers and, during the period of time described in this article, taught secondary education methods courses at a midsized state university in North Carolina. Wayne, a White male assistant professor in

his early thirties, had taught secondary social studies methods for several years, both as a doctoral student and as a faculty member, prior to the conversations that formed the basis of this article. Angela, a White assistant professor in her early thirties, was a doctoral student during the period described in this article who had taught secondary science methods since entering graduate school.

The university in which we taught is one of the most diverse in the state, with approximately 27% minority enrollment. However, our methods courses rarely contain that level of diversity; the narratives shared in this article took place in courses containing mostly White students with approximately equal numbers of males and females. Both undergraduate and lateral-entry students enter their methods courses having completed the majority of their education coursework, including courses in educational psychology, teaching diverse learners, and literacy in the content area. The undergraduates have completed a 30-hour internship as part of their diverse learners course, and they complete a 50-hour internship in conjunction with the methods course that will become their student-teaching placement the following semester. The lateral-entry students typically have full-time teaching positions during their methods courses, although in rare cases students have been admitted into the NC TEACH program without a teaching position and have been given internships during the methods semester while they seek employment.

The discussions about our methods instruction began over 2 years ago when we expressed frustration over our perceptions of the quality of our instruction due to the blended nature of our classes. Although Wayne taught primarily undergraduates and Angela taught primarily lateral-entry students, we faced a common problem in that we felt we were failing to meet the needs of a considerable portion of our students. Over the past 2 years, we have engaged in periodic critical reflections of our teaching in which we have shared our perceived instructional shortcomings with each other and offered advice and strategies based on our experiences.

Typically, these reflection sessions occurred after our methods classes had ended, which allowed us to disengage from our instruction and look at it more objectively (Law, 2003; Sarker, Sarker, & Siodrova, 2006). The narratives that follow offer a glimpse into where we currently are within this reflective process: making headway but still struggling with the challenges surrounding teaching blended classes. We believe that this reflection of our teaching is situated within the growing body of literature on self-study within teacher education (e.g., Adler, 1993; Dinkelman, 2003; Feldman, 2003; Freese, 2006; Zeichner, 2007), especially those studies that highlight the struggles and subsequent responses of teachers falling short of their pedagogical goals (e.g., Doecke, 2004; Lewis, 2004; McClam & Sevier, 2010; Sevier, 2005). Our narratives represent another stage in this development by allowing us to revisit significant experiences that have shaped our professional practice (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Lyle, 2009). We do not pres-

ent these narratives as definitive or typical cases of teaching blended classes; rather, we hope that our experiences lead other teacher educators in similar contexts to reflect on their own experiences (Ellis, 2004).

Two Narratives of Teaching Blended Methods Courses

Wayne's Experience

I teach secondary social studies methods, and I regularly have classes that predominately comprise undergraduates. However, I always have a handful of lateral-entry students in my classes each semester. Depending on the semester, I have had as few as 2 or as many as 10. I will begin by saying that in my experience working with lateral-entry students, I have found them to be as capable and energetic about teaching as any of the undergraduates I have taught, an observation that goes against some existing literature suggesting that, compared to traditional licensure students, many alternative licensure teachers have less commitment toward teaching and willingness to stay in the profession (see Zeichner & Schulte, 2001, for a comparison of the literature). Yet, given that my classes have been predominately undergraduates, I have tended to cater my instruction toward those students who have not spent significant time in front of a classroom, which has led to a variety of dispositional issues in my courses.

This tension is perhaps best illustrated by the semester in which I had 26 methods students, 9 of whom were lateral-entry teachers. During that semester, those lateral-entry students were a very vocal minority in the class. Almost all of them were stereotypical lateral-entry teachers: Most were in their late twenties or early thirties; many were in their first or second year of teaching; and most taught at underperforming schools with high teacher attrition rates. All of the lateral-entry teachers had undergraduate or graduate degrees in a social studies discipline (e.g., history, political science, geography), and several came to education after careers in the military or the private sector. All of the lateral-entry teachers had been accepted into the NC TEACH program, and they came to methods having taken their required courses in educational psychology, diversity, and literacy in the content area.

These lateral-entry teachers shared a classroom with 17 undergraduate students who had yet to student teach and whose classroom experience consisted of an internship in the previous semester. Although a few of the undergraduates were nontraditional students who, like the lateral-entry students, were turning to teaching after careers in the military or the private sector, the majority of the undergraduates were in their early twenties and planned on graduating the following spring. All of the undergraduates were majoring in a social studies discipline (almost all were history majors) and

were taking methods as part of their licensure requirements. The undergraduates' methods internship placements ranged anywhere from the same schools as the lateral-entry teachers to schools located in predominately White upper-class communities.

As one might expect, how members of these two groups conceptualized my classroom instruction and teaching in general differed considerably. My primary concern throughout the semester was that the often negative comments made by the lateral-entry teachers about their students and schools would begin to discourage the undergraduates, the majority of whom maintained a healthy mix of excitement and nervousness toward student teaching the following semester. For example, one of the activities that I used to end each class was a type of open forum in which we would discuss questions that members of the class had posed on the online course discussion board that related to issues they had observed or encountered in their internships or classrooms. More often than not, these discussions devolved from trying to find constructive ways to address similar types of problems in students' current or future classes to the lateral-entry teachers complaining that few of their students wanted to learn or that they had little institutional support at their school to deal with the multitude of behavioral or motivational problems in their classrooms.

While I must shoulder some of the blame for letting these discussions transcend into an attack on the educational situations of these teachers, it was amazing how quickly the undergraduates would cede the open forum to the lateral-entry teachers and listen intently to these nine students describe their frustrations. In hindsight, it seems understandable. Much has been written about the need for novice teachers to develop personal practical knowledge and theories about schooling based on their understandings of educational systems and teaching (e.g., Chant, 2009; Clandinin, 1989). In my methods classroom, the lateral-entry teachers were the voices of experience. They were the ones on the front lines, so to speak, and regardless of their relative inexperience, these lateral-entry teachers had war stories to share, and the undergraduates seemed to hang onto their every word. I would often attempt to interject with anecdotes from my own teaching experience, but 5 years removed from teaching high school in another state, my experiences probably seemed archaic compared to the stories of these lateral-entry teachers who were working in schools that might serve as student-teaching placements for some of the undergraduates the following semester.

Another source of frustration for me occurred when I attempted to describe research-based teaching strategies designed to make social studies instruction vibrant and engaging for students, at least compared to "traditional," lecture-based approaches to social studies, which research has shown that students find dull and ineffective (Chiodo & Byford, 2003). After modeling a strategy, I would inevitably hear one or more of the lateral-entry students make a comment along the lines of "I think my students would really like that, but

there is no way you would be able to do that in today's classrooms." When I pressed for a reason why, the answer would invariably be, "Because my principal/department head checks my lesson plans every day, and unless we can show we are specifically addressing a required standard, we can't do it." According to several lateral-entry students, their administrations supported only drill-and-repeat tactics designed to raise test scores on end-of-course state assessments, which research has shown is one of several responses that are typical of administrators charged with turning around a failing school (Granger, 2008; Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008). This refrain continued throughout the semester to the point that I actually had to sit two of the more vocal skeptics down after class and explain to them that not all administrators were like theirs and that I wanted to make sure they did not dissuade the undergraduates from trying these strategies in their student-teaching placements. They seemed to understand but remained unwilling to try methods beyond worksheets and lecture in their classes.

Again, the problem was not that these lateral-entry teachers were skeptical about the methods I modeled in class; in fact, I empathized with them. It is easy for university instructors working on campuses with abundant resources to tell teachers how they should be engaging in innovative activities in class while ignoring the realities of educational inequity. For example, implementing a webquest in a school without Internet access would be exceedingly difficult, the same way experimenting with unorthodox methods in a school with poor test scores may be exceedingly more difficult than in a school where passing test scores are an afterthought (Johnston-Parsons & Wilson, 2007). Yet, the issue that I had with these lateral-entry teachers' comments was the defeatist attitude they took toward anything outside the norm without even attempting to try them in their classrooms. Moreover, they raised the issue so matter-of-factly that it seemed to send the message that *no* teacher would be able to do these types of strategies in their classes, a potentially harrowing message to the impressionable undergraduates in the room.

Yet, it is easy to understand why these students felt the way they did. Unfortunately, the lowest-performing schools tend to be the ones that advocate draconian instructional methods to raise test scores, which can be extremely frustrating to ambitious teachers seeking to engage their students with learner-centered activities (Johnston-Parsons & Wilson, 2007). The teach-to-the-test mentality had been pounded into the heads of these lateral-entry teachers, and its effect could be seen in the astonished looks I received when I told the class that I did not want to see more than 20 to 25 minutes of lecture at any one time in their lesson plans. Almost all of the lateral-entry students struggled with writing these lessons because they felt that the only way they could adhere to the district-mandated pacing guide was by lecturing for nearly the entire 90-minute block. Considerable research in social studies education suggests that pressure to achieve passing scores on state assessments does not necessarily stifle ambitious classroom instruction (e.g.,

Gradwell, 2006; Grant, 2001), but those studies are often predicated on the fact that the teachers being studied have a variety of instructional strategies at their disposal. Unfortunately, many of these lateral-entry teachers used lecture and worksheets because they did not know of a better way to teach or it was the way they had been taught social studies in their own high school experience. By the time they reached my methods class, they had adopted that style as their own and viewed it as one that had brought them success, at least in terms of standardized test scores and administrator praise.

Overall, this inability of the lateral-entry teachers to recognize that their experiences were not indicative of all, or even most, teaching positions was the most difficult aspect of the course for me as an instructor. Certainly, I valued the experiences of these students, and I felt that the undergraduates in the class benefited from the realization that not all teaching environments are created equal. Moreover, looking back, I recognize that the complaining sessions may have been somewhat therapeutic for these lateral-entry teachers who were struggling to keep their heads above water (Cleveland, 2003). Yet, the overall negativity toward their schools, students, and administrations seemed to cast a pall over the entire classroom and, worse, may have damaged the undergraduates' teaching efficacy. Needless to say, it was a frustrating semester in many ways; yet, the semester started a process of reflection on the collective and separate needs of all my methods students, and I would like to believe that my instruction has grown stronger as a result of the challenges that I experienced in that course.

Angela's Experience

I teach secondary science methods. By virtue of science being an area of high teacher shortage and turnover, I tend to have high proportions of lateral-entry students in my classes. In past semesters, as much as two-thirds of my methods class have comprised these students. In my experience, lateral-entry teachers come to their teaching positions and to my methods class with a great passion for science teaching, many striving to convey their passion for and interest in science to their students. With backgrounds in research laboratories, industry, and health care, to name a few, lateral-entry teachers have great potential to foster habits of scientific inquiry in their students. A challenge exists, however, in promoting the teaching potential and meeting the needs of lateral-entry teachers while still attending to and supporting the development of traditional undergraduate students.

These lateral-entry teachers are in the midst of learning to teach science, figuring out who they are as science teachers, and taking education classes at the university. It is thereby understandable that the lateral-entry teachers' day-to-day teaching experiences find their way to the methods class. Lateral-entry teachers' focus on their current classroom issues permeate and oftentimes dominate classroom discussions, leaving the undergraduates, whose

backgrounds and teaching experiences are similar to the undergraduates described in Wayne's narrative, to perceive that they have little to contribute. This has led to a twofold hurdle in meeting the needs of *all* the developing teachers in my methods class: preserving a space for the lateral-entry teachers to unpack their experiences while encouraging the undergraduates to value their own experiences and opinions.

Encountering the challenges of the school and classroom often for the first time, lateral-entry teachers need and value the opportunity to discuss their experiences with teachers in similar situations. From time to time, though, their negative experiences overshadow their positive ones (e.g., Cleveland, 2003), and lateral-entry teachers' somewhat jaded perspectives influence the perspectives of the undergraduate students. Since the lateral-entry teachers bring the voice of experience to class, the undergraduates oftentimes defer to their experiences, opinions, and ideas. If, for example, many of the lateral-entry teachers do not think that a reform-based teaching strategy would be effective in their classrooms, the undergraduates become more reluctant to include it in their internship teaching.

Although the undergraduate students have had internship experiences, they are reluctant to draw on and value these experiences during class discussions, activities, and assignments, perhaps because their amount of classroom experience is limited in comparison to that of the lateral-entry teachers. Research has shown that the more time that preservice teachers have in classrooms, the more efficacy they show toward teaching as a profession and the policies and procedures that affect classroom instruction (Spooner, Flowers, Lambert, & Algozzine, 2008). Moreover, the fact that lateral-entry teachers typically outnumber undergraduate students in my classes two to one makes it challenging to encourage undergraduate students to speak up and not defer to the lateral-entry teachers.

For example, since the development of science education reform initiatives such as the National Science Education Standards (National Research Council, 1996), inquiry has been viewed as synonymous to effective science teaching and learning (Anderson, 2002). For teachers to incorporate inquiry-based instruction into their science teaching, they must have an understanding of the nature of science (Abd-El-Khalick, Bell, & Lederman, 1998) and student-centered approaches to learning science (see Bybee, 2002, 2006 for an explanation of the 5E instructional model), as well as experiences and opportunities to develop an informed understanding of scientific inquiry skills (Anderson, 2002; Jeanpierre, 2006; Marx & Harris, 2006).

Since inquiry-based instruction remains uncommon in today's science classrooms, it is likely that lateral-entry teachers and undergraduates alike were taught high school and college science in traditional, didactic ways (Luehmann, 2007). In fact, as we discuss these reform-based teaching practices, lateral-entry teachers typically evoke their own experiences and situations and speak about the impracticality of or difficulty with implementing

such practices. As discussed in Wayne's experiences, many lateral-entry teachers, feeling the pressures of standardized testing and accountability, default to traditional, teacher-centered teaching practices. Though they see the inherent value in reform-based inquiry instruction, they tend to rely more heavily on the ways in which they successfully learned science and the ways they have observed their colleagues teaching science, which were likely traditional and not inquiry based.

As one of the top five areas experiencing teacher shortages (Keller, 2003), science classrooms will likely continue to be staffed with increasing numbers of lateral-entry teachers. As these teachers enroll in university methods classes, they, as well as the undergraduate students in class with them, need and deserve the best support possible in their development as high school science teachers. Due to varying degrees of experience and training, however, these two groups tend to have quite diverse needs, creating unique challenges in methods classes containing both populations of aspiring science teachers.

Discussion

As both our narratives illustrate, teaching blended methods classes can be challenging. Clearly, one solution to this issue would be to have separate methods classes for traditional and alternative licensure students (Corbell et al., 2010); however, university economics and limited enrollments do not always make such an option possible. Therefore, as alternative licensure programs continue to grow throughout the United States, teacher educators of blended classes will have to develop ways to meet the needs of both their traditional and lateral-entry teachers.

As our narratives show, we faced many of the same issues even though the proportion of undergraduates versus lateral-entry students was essentially opposite in our two classes. We use the remainder of this article to briefly discuss the strategies we have implemented or plan to implement in our methods classes as a result of our shared experiences. It is our hope that other methods instructors in similar situations can adapt these strategies to their own classrooms.

One of the common issues that both of us have faced is that of lateral-entry students complaining about their teaching experiences. Although we both see the need for these students to commiserate and vent to one another about the problems they are facing at work, neither of us has handled this aspect of our classes in a way that has been beneficial for all of our students. For example, in the past, Angela has chosen to segregate lateral-entry and undergraduate students during portions of her class by establishing subject area (biology, chemistry, earth/environmental science, and physics) professional learning communities.

In Angela's classes, lateral-entry teachers meet in their respective learning communities for the first hour of every other class meeting. In these communities, they share lesson plans, articles about content and science instruction, and their experiences. This has become a space for them to engage with other new teachers in similar situations and discover they are not alone in their challenges, frustrations, and experiences. While the lateral-entry teachers meet in their learning communities, Angela meets with the undergraduates to discuss and unpack their internship experiences. The undergraduates talk about what they observed in their internship placements with regard to students, teachers, and administrators and about the lessons they planned and taught. The discussions center on the experiences and opinions of the undergraduates with the aim of encouraging them to value what they bring to the methods class and to their internship placement. Though the learning communities provide lateral-entry teachers with a space to unpack their experiences and talk about science teaching and learning, this structure unintentionally prevents the undergraduates from learning from the lateral-entry teachers' experiences, including their failures and successes.

Although this strategy has avoided the possible discouragement that may have occurred in Wayne's classes, on the basis of our conversations, we have since agreed that it is beneficial for undergraduates to be exposed to the "realities" of teaching, particularly in low-performing schools. At the same time, we want to avoid the constant negativity that has come to encompass discussions of teaching in Wayne's classes. We have found that putting our students into blended small groups has been effective in establishing an equal partnership between lateral-entry and undergraduate students in class. Similar to the strategy used by Angela, we often divide our students into subject area subgroups, but instead of grouping them by level of experience, we structure the groups so that there is a proportional blend of undergraduates and lateral-entry students in each group. We have found that the smaller groups allow all students to feel as though they can contribute to discussions as equals.

Within whole-class discussions, however, we both still run into the problems articulated by Wayne in that the lateral-entry teachers tend to dominate discussions. In our conversations about our classes, we have considered several ways to combat this issue. First, we have decided to revisit an old teaching staple: setting expectations for discussions at the beginning of the semester. Lateral-entry teachers venting about their work is akin to student teachers complaining about their placements, and as any student-teaching supervisor can attest, those types of discussions can become unproductive if specific guidelines are not in place. We want our lateral-entry teachers to feel as though their methods class is a safe place to express their frustration with teaching, but we also want to ensure they are not complaining for the sake of complaining. In other words, we want all discussions in our classes to be productive, meaning that the goal of expressing frustration in class should be

to seek help and advice from one's peers rather than simply seeking validation from others in similar situations.

Second, we feel that it is important to provide the undergraduates in our classes with more teaching experience to make them feel as though they can enter into the lateral-entry teachers' discussions. In both of our classes, it is evident that the lateral-entry teachers hold positions of authority in the class due to their experience in front of a classroom. We have decided to revamp our 50-hour undergraduate internship requirement to include more opportunities for coteaching and self-directed lessons at the beginning of the semester to give these students more confidence in their ability to discuss pedagogical issues in class.

A third strategy that we have employed, with varying levels of success, has been to move more of these types of discussions online. For example, we both regularly maintain weekly threaded discussion boards on Blackboard. This online space is used to share experiences and resources and pose questions about instruction, resources, and specific classroom issues. While the undergraduates learn from these communications, they are able to share ideas and resources with the lateral-entry teachers, strengthening the value the undergraduates ascribe to their experiences and opinions. However, one pitfall with the online discussions that Angela found is that many of her lateral-entry teachers do not regularly contribute to the online forum. As these lateral-entry teachers juggle learning to teach on the job with the expectations of their administrators and university instructors, their time, efforts, and energies are spread quite thin, which may explain their lack of participation. As a result, we both have considered making the Blackboard discussions part of the course requirements and assigning a grade to students' online participation.

Finally, another common issue that we have faced is the nearly uniform skepticism from the lateral-entry teachers about the research-based practices we model in methods. While many undergraduates may come to the same conclusion during their student teaching, we want them to at least try learner-centered approaches before deciding that they do not mesh with the teach-to-the-test mentality too often advocated by school and district administrators. However, when the "voices of experience" in class regularly denounce these approaches as undoable, it sends a message to the undergraduates that they should not even bother trying.

We have decided that we need to provide evidence that research-based strategies can, in fact, work in a variety of educational settings. Simply providing the theory behind a strategy or telling students how a strategy worked in our own classrooms does little to satisfy the harshest skeptics: For students, research does not often seem applicable, because it occurred in "other" places with "other" students, and the same can probably be said for our teaching experiences even though we have both taught within the confines of high-stakes testing. Instead, we have begun searching for local teachers in a variety of contexts—rural, urban, and suburban—who practice learner-centered,

research-based strategies in their classroom. We plan to invite them to help coteach our methods classes and create assignments where all our students have the opportunity to observe these master teachers in action. It is our hope that once our students see that ambitious teaching can occur in the most stringent of environments, even the most jaded skeptics will consider rethinking their teaching philosophies.

For lateral-entry teachers who are employed full-time, being able to leave their schools to observe other teachers may not be easy. Therefore, our final point of action is to take the advice of Gimbert and colleagues (2005) and work harder to establish relationships with our local high schools so that we can better explain to principals and district administrators the needs of their lateral-entry teachers and the potential benefits they may reap from this type of professional development. In doing so, perhaps more of our lateral-entry teachers will feel as if they have greater latitude to experiment with nontraditional strategies in their classrooms, and, as a result, they may be more open to considering research-based strategies in methods class.

Conclusion

As we stated at the outset of this article, our purpose in sharing our experiences was to start a conversation about an issue that has received scant attention in the literature. We certainly do not claim to have perfect solutions, and undoubtedly, there are measures that we have not yet considered. However, by engaging in this process of sharing and reflection about our teaching, we feel that we have identified common issues pertaining to teaching blended classes and found possible solutions that will improve the educational experiences of our lateral-entry and undergraduate students.

In the semesters since we have first started discussing this issue, we both have implemented several of the ideas presented here with moderate success. Perhaps the most influential change in our instruction is the emphasis that we have placed on finding constructive solutions to issues raised by all our students but especially those raised by the lateral-entry teachers that seem to be borne out of frustration with their administrators or students. We still let them vent—to a point—before we shift the conversation to finding a practical solution to the issue. Moreover, in the past year, the university has revised its secondary education program so that the undergraduate students are receiving more time in classrooms prior to student teaching. It is too soon to determine whether this increase in the amount of internship time will affect the undergraduates' feelings of efficacy, but if existing research is a guide, then it should give them more confidence to contribute to discussions in their methods classes. Finally, we both have found the electronic discussion board on Blackboard to be very useful in minimizing any negativity brought into class by lateral-entry students and encouraging the efficacy of

the undergraduates. We are still exploring all of the various features of using Blackboard to facilitate internship discussions, such as putting students into smaller groups online rather than using whole-class discussions, but overall, the online element seems to minimize lateral-entry teachers' negativity while offering a safe environment for undergraduates to contribute.

We plan to further this conversation as long as we both continue to teach blended methods classes, and we encourage others to do the same. As alternative licensure programs become more prevalent and blended classes become more common, we hope that more teacher educators will begin to reflect on and research their own classes so that we can better identify best practices of teaching traditional and alternative licensure students together. In many ways, it is an issue of practicing what we preach: If we tell our students to differentiate their instruction to meet the needs of all students in their classes, then it seems imperative that we do the same. TEP

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